

Climb, Connect, Grow: Promoting Inclusion and Empowerment Through the Mountains of Greece

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Areas of work: Design and implementation of initiatives that promote social inclusion, empowerment, sustainability and personal growth through climbing, hiking, mountaineering and outdoor activities.

Keywords

Inclusion, empowerment, outdoor education, climbing, hiking, community, diversity

Summary

Korfes is a non-profit organization based in rural Greece that promotes inclusion, empowerment, and well-being through climbing, hiking, and mountain activities. Its name, *Korfes*, means “peaks” in Greek, reflecting both the natural landscapes in which the organization operates and the personal heights participants can achieve. Guided by its motto “Climb – Connect - Grow”, *Korfes* opens access to the mountains for everyone — regardless of age, gender, background, or ability — offering all activities free of charge and on a voluntary basis. Through outdoor activities, it fosters confidence, intercultural exchange, and social participation, turning mountains into platforms for inclusion and growth.

Problem Statement

In Greece, mountain regions are rich in natural beauty and potential, yet participation in outdoor activities remains limited and often unequal. Access to activities like climbing, hiking, and mountaineering is typically restricted by socioeconomic barriers, gender stereotypes, lack of infrastructure, and limited awareness. Studies show that women in Greece continue to participate less in organized sport and outdoor recreation compared to men, largely due to enduring gender norms and unequal access to resources (MarLab, University of Macedonia, 2023).

People living in rural, remote, or economically disadvantaged areas — as well as women, migrants, and older adults — often face additional obstacles, from cost and transportation issues to cultural perceptions that mountain activities are risky, exclusive, or only for professionals (Climb it UP, 2024). In many rural regions, opportunities for accessible outdoor recreation are limited, and the lack of public transport or local infrastructure further restricts participation. Moreover, migration dynamics in Greece have shaped communities with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, where newcomers and locals alike may lack access to inclusive recreational spaces (MDPI, 2023). As a result, outdoor activities and sports are often perceived as activities reserved for the privileged few rather than as accessible forms of community well-being and connection with nature (Eurostat, 2023).

At the same time, modern lifestyles and urbanization have distanced many people from nature, leading to reduced physical and mental well-being across the country (Eurostat, 2023). In such contexts, outdoor activities are not just recreational; they are transformative. They build resilience, foster connection, and nurture confidence.

Korfes was founded in response to these challenges, rooted in the belief that the mountains can be a space for everyone. By bringing diverse individuals together to climb, hike, and explore, *Korfes* helps overcome barriers of access and perception, transforming outdoor experiences into pathways for inclusion, equality, and empowerment in rural Greece and beyond. All activities are offered free of charge and on a voluntary basis, ensuring that participation is never limited by financial constraints.

Commenté [CA1]: This section is great! You could perhaps add one or two points that are more specific to the Greek context (e.g. migration dynamics or rural gender norms) to make it even stronger.

Commenté [K2R1]: I added a few points and references.

About the Organisation

Korfes is a non-profit organization based in a small mountain village in Greece, dedicated to promoting social inclusion, empowerment, and well-being through climbing, hiking, and mountain activities. Through its inclusive approach, *Korfes* develops activities that combine climbing and mountain activities, outdoor expeditions, workshops, and trainings on inclusive outdoor skills, teamwork, communication, and well-being, with a strong foundation in outdoor education, nature-based learning, inclusive design, and sustainability. Participants explore not only the natural environment but also their own inner landscapes, building confidence, trust, and a sense of belonging.

Our activities engage individuals from diverse backgrounds — including locals, migrants, young people, women, and older adults — promoting intercultural and intergenerational exchange and helping to break down stereotypes. Whether reaching a summit or supporting each other along a trail, participants experience equality, mutual respect, and collective achievement.

Outdoor education principles are central: after each activity, participants reflect on challenges, emotions, and teamwork, nurturing empathy, communication skills, and social cohesion. The organization also contributes to gender equality by creating safe and welcoming spaces for women and girls to participate in mountain activities.

By offering all activities free of charge and on a voluntary basis, *Korfes* ensures equitable access and removes financial barriers. Through these inclusive and holistic programs, climbing, hiking, and mountaineering become not only recreational pursuits but transformative tools for personal growth, community building, and social empowerment.

Outcomes:

Since its establishment in February 2025, *Korfes* has engaged a growing number of participants in its climbing, hiking, and mountain education activities, with more than 180 participants of all ages and backgrounds having participated in its activities.

Outcomes are visible both individually and collectively: participants report improved confidence, reduced stress, and a stronger sense of belonging. Many

Commenté [K3]: I added this part.

describe the activities as opportunities to “breathe again,” “overcome fear,” or “find peace.”

The presence of diverse participants has contributed to changing social attitudes within the community. Climbing and hiking are no longer seen as exclusive, competitive, meaningless or inaccessible, but as shared experiences that unite people and foster understanding. By making mountain activities inclusive, *Korfes* demonstrates how outdoor activities can promote equality, well-being, and community cohesion.

Successes and Challenges:

A major success of *Korfes* has been its ability to build a supportive, diverse, and inclusive community around mountain activities. Participants consistently highlight how the organization has created spaces of trust and mutual encouragement and understanding, where differences are celebrated rather than erased. *Korfes* has also inspired collaborations with local stakeholders and European organizations, expanding its network and visibility.

The organization was founded by three co-founders who share a passion for the mountains and the transformative experiences they offer. Today, the team is comprised of nine people: the three co-founders who initiated the organization, along with six additional permanent members and interns who share a deep love for the outdoors and collaboratively plan and organize all activities. Approximately 50 volunteers and registered members contribute to and support the organization’s mission. *Korfes* is always happy to welcome new members and volunteers who wish to join its team and initiatives.

However, challenges remain. Ensuring long-term sustainability with limited funding, addressing logistical barriers in remote areas, and shifting cultural attitudes toward inclusivity in outdoor activities are ongoing efforts. *Korfes* addresses these challenges by maintaining strong connection with its members, focusing on small-scale, meaningful interventions, and prioritizing inclusion and connection over performance or competition. Offering all activities free of charge requires ongoing resourcefulness and partnerships to maintain accessibility. At the moment, *Korfes* operates primarily on its own funds, with some limited support from members who can contribute by purchasing a *Korfes* T-shirt at a very modest price. The organization also

Commenté [CA4]: Maybe you could also add a few details about the volunteers? Since it’s small-scale and local, it would be great to understand who’s behind the project and who carries it. If you happen to have a few numbers (even very approximate ones) to give a sense of scale, that would be super helpful!

Commenté [K5R4]: Added above

Commenté [CA6]: Super interesting ! I would love to know a bit more about that, especially since the organization is still quite new.

Commenté [K7R6]: Done!

collaborates with national stakeholders, the municipality, EU partners, and volunteers to access equipment, venues, and expertise. In addition, careful planning and small-scale interventions allow the team to maximize impact while keeping activities inclusive and financially accessible to all. This approach ensures that participation is never limited by cost, making mountain experiences available to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- The mountains serve as natural classrooms for inclusion, where the shared challenges of outdoor activities foster equality, empathy, and cooperation among participants. Engaging with these environments also empowers individuals, helping them reconnect with themselves, develop self-awareness, and build resilience and confidence.
- True accessibility requires thoughtful adaptation, ensuring that routes, methods, and group dynamics are tailored to meet the needs of all participants. Involving local communities from the outset strengthens initiatives and makes them more sustainable, while collaboration with partners at both local and international levels amplifies impact, shares good practices, and supports continuity.
- Investing in inclusive outdoor education is essential to foster equality, promote mental well-being, and build stronger, more cohesive communities. Mountain and nature-based activities should be recognized as powerful tools for social transformation, offering unique opportunities for personal and collective growth.
- Supporting grassroots initiatives that connect people through shared outdoor experiences is key to promoting equitable access to sport and creating inclusive spaces where everyone can participate, learn, and thrive.

References:

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- *Climb It Up Project* (2024). *E-publication: Climbing for Social Inclusion & Diversity – Final Study Report*. June 2024. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1klavtkkSYy_dNDGn7kxwIdJz75WX4niz/view

Complementary material:

Korfes served as the implementing partner for Greece on [Climb It Up](#), by organizing a Climbing festival and a 5-day pilot climbing training for migrants and ethnic minorities. Climb it UP is an EU-funded project, which focused on promoting social inclusion and diversity through climbing. Useful resources and findings from this project can be found below:

- <https://climbitup.eu/#news>
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jRembUmN6z-B_T8f-foPX9dBilkpfuMq/view
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1klavtkkSYy_dNDGn7kxwIdJz75WX4niz/view

Commenté [K8]: Add this if relevant.



